



Edition: February 2004

**\* Opening of the Legal Year**  
**\* Customary Law: where to  
from here?**  
**\* Ceremonial sittings for Chief  
Justice Brian Martin**

# Looking forward to some welcome respite and an Easter break

Seriously, is everybody out there stressed? The number of people I have run into of late telling me that they are "working really hard, and it's all very stressful" is concerning, especially given that it is only March and we still have nine months of the year to go! I know that's not a very cheery thought but we may be able to console ourselves with the fact that at least we have an Easter break and hopefully some "R & R".

I am convinced that our lives are more stressful now because everything is so instantaneous. We thought facsimiles were fast and now we have email and mobile phones and people can contact us anytime and anywhere. Whilst I am not advocating that we go back to the pace of life in the 1800s I cannot help but think of the Hugh Jackman movie 'Kate and Leopold' and feel that I wouldn't mind jumping back in time, especially with Hugh Jackman. I know ladies, I'm not alone.

Certainly a little time for reflection is called for. Speaking of reflection, has anyone noticed the sky of late? The other week, I walked out of my office at about 7pm and the sky was a magnificent pink and grey. I suddenly realised it had been some time since I had taken the time to look up. It was so impressive that I went inside and made Sue Porter come out and have a look as well.

How did we get to this frantic state that we are all so accepting of it? Australia used to be known laid back. The anecdotal evidence about weekly work hours does not seem to support this idea. Even our recreational time seems to be scheduled and planned.

One Easter Sunday, during my university years, I remember two of my friends passionately advocated for a three day weekend and a four day working week, while we all sat around in a spa drinking champagne and port. At the time, naively anxious to start my career, I was horrified at the suggestion. Now, I can't think of anything better. Mind you, even with a designated three-day weekend most of us would still end up working six days a week. When did it become a requirement that we over extend ourselves and try to achieve so much?

By way of example, since my last report I have travelled south twice for overnight meetings. The amount of time we spend travelling for meetings these days is astonishing. My parents' equivalent of "I had to walk five miles to school, in the snow, with no shoes..." is that it used to take nine hours to drive from Katherine to Darwin. Is it progress that it now takes two and a half hours?

To put it all in context, I do feel that I have achieved some things in the last month. In particular, the Law Council of Australia's (LCA) Tort Law Reform Working Committee has now completed a report to the LCA and a



Merran Short, President

national Tort Law Reform resource kit will be available in all jurisdictions.

The overwhelming concern of the LCA and the LSNT is the erosion of people's rights. Much like mandatory sentencing, Tort Law Reform sounds like a good idea until it affects you or someone you know and then the full impact is realised. For example, the introduction of a minimum threshold for claims of \$15,000 will clearly disenfranchise the elderly, children and unemployed people who are unlikely to have any economic loss component to their claim but have nevertheless suffered an injury which greatly impacts on their lives. Arguably, all we are doing is shifting the onus of responsibility to Centrelink and other government bodies and ultimately to the taxpayer.

I hope that everyone has an opportunity to enjoy the Easter break, and remember: 'we should work to live, not live to work'.

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